

# The Epicenter

Employee Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System • Edition 1, 2008

## Purple Uniforms Are Gracing the Grounds of VA Palo Alto and Menlo Park Campuses

During the last few months, you may have seen some unfamiliar faces in purple uniforms around the VA Menlo Park and Palo Alto campuses. The faces are of three Golden Retriever brothers, Verde, Venuto and Vegas, just out of puppy stage. Alongside or within a short distance, is usually Grandpa Gabe, affectionately known as, “Grandpaws,” patiently observing and gently [yet firmly], keeping the pups in focus.

The dogs hail from the Assistance Dog Institute (ADI) in Santa Rosa, Calif. and are part of the Paws for Purple Hearts Program. The brothers joined the VAPAHCS Trauma Recovery Program at Menlo Park in the summer.

The concept for the program originated from Rick Yount, Paws for Purple Hearts Program Director. Yount identified a need and a desire to support our service members and Veterans. According to ADI, the program builds on the time-honored tradition of Veterans helping Veterans. One component, the Warrior CARE (Canine Assisted Reintegration Experience) engages service members in a mission to train service dogs as part of their rehabilitative therapy.

Under the guidance of Mr. Rick Yount, our Veterans train the brothers to become service dogs.

This type of collaboration is the first in VA!

The VA pilot program is sure to be a beacon of hope and transformation for patients, Veterans and staff. Several Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans have shared their inexplicable comfort from interacting with the dogs. The dogs are oblivious to any “disability,” their mission is to offer unconditional love, acceptance and support and they provide that and so much more.

The theme of “giving” is weaved into all aspects of the training program. It was a new and innovative program, which could address the unique needs not only of our recent combat Veterans, but also of Veterans from all eras. The program coincides with the VA’s movement towards focusing more on patient-centered care; it certainly complements VAPAHCS programs.

Leading the coordination process from the VAPAHCS was Caroline Wyman, Chief of Recreation Therapy Service. According to Wyman, it can be an arduous task to launch a new program but the tenacity is paying off more than anyone dreamed.

“Understandably, there were barriers along the way, but all were possible to navigate through and here we are,” said Wyman. “The support from leadership was encouraging and made the yearlong [approval] process very worthwhile,” she said.

Based on observations between patients and dogs, staff and dogs, or community stakeholders/partners and the dogs, we have seen Grandpa Gabe and his grand pups become a catalyst for change...a change within ourselves and change in the acceptance of new “out of the box” modalities, which are serving and supporting our Veterans.

For more information about the program, please read my Interview with Caroline Wyman, RTS Chief and Rick Yount, Paws for Purple Hearts Program Director:

### How did VAPAHCS initially get involved with the Assistance Dog Institute and the Paws for Purple Hearts Program?

Wyman: Rick had a vision to bring this concept of training service dogs to the VAPAHCS, Walter Reed...wherever the door was open to help our Veterans.

### I understand this is the first VA program partnership of its kind - what was the process to implement? What were some of the obstacles?

Wyman: Recreation Therapy Service developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and worked closely with Regional Counsel to capture all areas that required addressing. We also needed to work closely with the Trauma Recovery Programs at Menlo Park to ensure the teams appropriately evaluated and addressed clinical considerations. Their support was key to launching and maintaining a successful program.

Collaborations between VAPAHCS, ADI, Recreation Therapy Service (RTS), Trauma Recovery Program and Regional Counsel proved successful after a year. It was necessary to ensure Mr. Yount could be a part of the culture of the health care system and understand all of the clinical implications and needs of the patients to be better able to implement the pilot program.

### **What type of training has VAPAHCS staff received?**

Wyman: Rick provided us with training through in-services, reading material, answering questions and hands on trainings with the dogs- in a classroom setting and out in the community. Several staff, patients visited the Assistance Dog Institute in Santa Rosa to meet with the organization, students and staff.

### **Forward-thinking and non-traditional therapies, such as animal assisted therapy, have complemented our traditional approaches to health care system, how does this program differ from previous programs?**

Yount: The Paws for Purple Hearts Program is unique because a Veteran is actively involved in training a service dog that will be placed with another Veteran. It is a win-win as far as treatment outcomes for both parties. This program differs from typical animal assisted therapy because this program engages Veterans in the shaping of behaviors of the service dog they are training. This provides an opportunity for Veterans in the Trauma Recovery Program to learn behavior management techniques and behavior learning theories.

### **What type of responses are you receiving about the program?**

Wyman: Everyone agrees that there are [visible] positive results thus far. The testimonials from the Veteran patients say it all.

Yount: We've observed many positive results such as: increased social interactions reducing isolation, improved emotional affect, increased patience and impulse control, improved sleep and an improved self worth and sense of belonging are only a few of the observations. In addition, there has been a reduction in pain medicine requests and improved parenting skills and attitudes. We have seen an improvement in assertiveness skills and our patients are differentiating between assertiveness and aggressiveness. We hope to continue engaging and capturing as many patients as possible on either end of the spectrum - trainers and recipients.

# A Word From Our Director

I want to congratulate all of you for your stellar results achieved in Fiscal Year 2008. Once again, the VA Palo Alto Health Care System ranked first among the most complex of VA health care systems. This is an amazing achievement especially considering it is one you achieved for the second year in a row! While we are constantly measured with literally hundreds of separate metrics, I am most proud of the quality of the care you provide and of the high satisfaction of our patients.

In Fiscal Year 2009, we will be renewing our commitment to patient-centered care through a number of new initiatives. We have several new system redesign efforts underway that will critically examine and improve everything from the quality of the care we provide in our intensive care units, to the care at the bedside on our medical units; to the processes, we use to hire staff. We are fortunate to have two local leaders who are also system redesign experts – Dr. Paul Helgersen, Chief, Inpatient Medicine, and Shirley Paulson, RN, MPA, Chief Nurse for Acute Care and Critical Care. Along with Paul and Shirley, we are developing and training what I hope will become dozens of new performance improvement champions who will guide us as we critically examine everything we do with the goal of providing “optimal care” for our veterans.

“Optimal care” can have many definitions. Our challenge will be to optimize each individual patient’s experience. As many of us become more involved in the care of a parent or family member, we realize the gap between the current states of most health care systems and “optimal care” is vast. We are fortunate to be a part of a health care system that emphasizes “health” over providing “health care.”

One new step we will take is to listen to our patients and their families in new ways. We are using a new national patient satisfaction tool that will reduce the time between the survey is administered and the time the results are obtained. We will be partnering with other health care systems to follow models they have developed to form patient/family councils to give us more direct input into our decision-making committees. My hope is that this effort will grow over time to involve all major health care system committees. Some of our committees, such as the Patient Education Committee, have followed this model successfully for years.

Another step we are taking is pursuing magnet status for our Nursing service. The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation awarded VAPAHCS in August 2008. The monies will provide an on-site visit of two nursing consultants from the American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC) on February 11-13, 2009. From this visit, the consultants describing our readiness with suggested areas for improvement while pursuing the Magnet process will prepare a gap analysis. ANCC Magnet designation is recognition for nursing excellence, and identifies healthcare organizations that epitomize outstanding quality and professionalism. The estimated timeframe for VAPAHCS’s journey will be three years.

We are very fortunate to have many terrific new faces join our leadership team. John Chardos, MD, our new ACOS for Ambulatory care, Michael Furrugia, RN, PhD, CNA, our new ACOS for Nursing Education, Gloria Martinez, MS, RN, our new Nurse Executive and Joanne Krumberger, BS, MSc, FACHE, our new Associate Director, all bring years of innovative ideas, experience and enthusiasm to our quest for continuous improvement. I encourage all of you to meet these new leaders and welcome them to VAPAHCS.

We have many exciting construction initiatives affecting nearly every one of our nine sites. I encourage you to follow our progress on these projects through our weekly news and notes emails to all employees. We know there will be many growing pains such as parking shortages, outages, and other inconveniences, especially at the Palo Alto campus. However, the rewards will be fantastic, starting with the replacement, community living center opening in the summer of 2009 at Menlo Park.

I greatly appreciate everyone’s hard work and many sacrifices in continuously meeting and exceeding our ever-present challenges. I thank you and our Veterans thank you.

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman

Director

# *The Spirit of Giving and Community Continues Through Creating Art*

Patients from the VAPAHCS enjoyed the Holiday Season with that wildly successful Craft Fair program. For the past 33 years, Recreation Therapy Service has kicked off Holiday Programs for veterans from both the Palo Alto and Menlo Park Divisions with this event.

This year's program held on December 3, 2008, hosted 25 learning stations.

"One of the unique qualities of this program is that each volunteer group brings supplies for patients and assists in the creating, supporting and completion of crafts, and they work with the Veterans," said Thomas McCarthy, VAPAHCS SCI Lead Recreation Therapist.

The evening proved to be festive for our patients with the creation of many artistic and unique gifts and decorations. McCarthy proudly described the Craft Fair as a unique event, which brings our veteran patients and community volunteers together in the true holiday spirit of giving and sharing. This year more than 200 community volunteers joyously worked with more than 150 patients.

Special thanks to our individual and volunteer groups:

- Veteran patients
- American Legion Auxiliary
- Daughters of the American Revolution
- Cupertino Federated Womens' Club
- AT & T Pioneers
- Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts
- Youth Community High School Groups from Gunn, Los Altos, Mt. View and Palo Alto High Schools
- South Bay Blue Star Moms
- American Red Cross
- County of Santa Clara Sheriff Office

## Customer Service Quick Tips

It only takes a few seconds...

Have you ever walked up to a reception area and the employee behind the counter either neglected to greet you and just shuffled a sign in clipboard towards you, or completely ignored you, while they continued their personal phone call?

Imagine patiently sitting in the waiting room after driving an hour to be early for your appointment, while the minutes turn into an eternity. To culminate the "experience," the staff member, showed no empathy or compassion when abruptly informing you that you were in the wrong area and pointed you to an unfamiliar location. Many people in the aforementioned scenario might feel upset, offended or unappreciated, and want to file a complaint. This patient decided not to formally complain because he thought "the world of the VA" and believed it would not be fair to blame the entire hospital or VA, when only one employee did not demonstrate quality customer service.

That example is based on a recent and actual patient experience.

The employee referenced is a representative of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System. He or she had an opportunity to provide basic quality customer service, which our Veterans deserve.

It only takes a few seconds to make eye contact and sincerely welcome our Veterans and visitors. In the midst of our daily routines, we should remember the sacrifices and commitment these men and women have borne, and what their families experience. We are all familiar with poor customer service and should remember how it felt when someone took his or her "bad day" out on us.

Our VAPAHCS team is committed to a mission of service. The countless complimentary letters and words from Veterans and families are true testimonials to our achievements, yet, we always strive to improve where and when needed. Most of our Veterans report great satisfaction with our services however, it only takes one bad experience and the following few words to tarnish our reputation, "I have always been happy with the care that I received, but..."

Each one of you is the face of VAPAHCS. While the patient or visitor may not remember your name, or what you look like, they will remember how they were treated. They will remember they felt welcomed, appreciated and you were proud to serve them. [By the way, we should extend quality customer service between employees, as we are internal, "customers" as well].

Remember, 'it only takes a few seconds' to make our Veterans feel like they truly come first.

## Traumatic Injury Protection Program Expands Benefits

# VA Announces Changes to Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced some severely injured military personnel and veterans will be eligible for improvements to the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection Program, known as TSGLI.

VA recently completed a comprehensive review of the program, as it marked its first year in operation, to consider whether the program was meeting its intended purpose, by evaluating the addition of new injuries or losses, and through considering improvements to the administration of the program.

Because of this review, VA has increased the number of injuries covered as well as liberalized the criteria of other injuries. New injuries covered include the partial amputation of a hand or foot and the degree of injuries based on severe burns.

Another important change to the TSGLI program is the payment of a \$25,000 benefit to service members hospitalized for 15 consecutive days due to a traumatic injury. This allows payments to begin earlier and the receipt of financial help sooner.

Changes to benefits are retroactive to October 7, 2001, the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, consistent with the original legislation creating TSGLI.

The TSGLI program assists in providing severely injured service members and their families with short-term financial assistance. Service members who sustained certain severe injuries are entitled to payments ranging between \$25,000 and \$100,000.

TSGLI assists in offsetting the expenses a service member's parents or spouse often incur when they move to be with their loved one during long and difficult treatment and rehabilitation periods, frequently causing family members to leave their jobs and homes for extended periods.

Since the program began in 2005, more than \$309 million in TSGLI benefits have been paid to injured members and their families.

Veteran claims for TSGLI benefits, previously disallowed, will be contacted if it appears their loss is now eligible for payment due to these changes.

Service members or veterans who sustained severe traumatic injuries are encouraged to check the VA Insurance website at [www.insurance.va.gov](http://www.insurance.va.gov) for eligibility criteria and contact information, please forward this information to those who it may apply. The Web site contains a link to the TSGLI application form, more information about the changes to the TSGLI benefit, and a complete copy of the latest review of the program. For additional information about VA benefits, contact VA's toll-free number at 1-800-827-1000.

## *Gretchen Roberts: Celebrating not one, but two milestones!*

Gretchen Roberts was recently recognized at the Director's staff meeting for her 35 years of government service in the VA. Gretchen has been an employee of Canteen Service, working all of her 35 years at the Palo Alto VA.

As if that milestone was not impressive enough, Gretchen will celebrate her 90th birthday on Valentine's Day. It seems like that would set some sort of record!

According to Jonathan Fagman, Assistant Canteen Chief, "The employees and patients look forward to seeing Gretchen because she always seems positive and has a smile on her face."

On behalf of the entire VAPAHCS, we wish Gretchen the best!

*Congratulations and "Thank You" for your service!*

# *VAPAHCS Extends Its Welcome To ...*

## **Joanne M. Krumberger, RN, CHE** **Associate Director,**

Joanne M. Krumberger received her appointment as Associate Director, VA Palo Alto Health Care System, on January 4, 2009. Prior to her appointment as Associate Director, Ms. Krumberger held the position of Associate Director at the VA Northern California Health Care System from March 2006-January 2009 and Performance Improvement Manager at the Milwaukee Veterans Affairs Medical Center, where she served from July 2000 through March 2006.

She began her VA career in 1979 as a staff nurse in the surgical intensive care unit and then served as the Critical Care Advanced Practice Nurse for Acute and Critical Care, and Nurse Manager of the Medical and Surgical Intensive Care Units at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

In recognition of her numerous contributions to the nursing profession, she was inducted as a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing in 1998. She served as national president of the American Association of Critical Care Nursing in 1997 and the VA National Advisory Board on Innovation in Nursing Practice from 1997-1998. She received national recognition in 1996 when she received the Clinical Nursing Excellence Award from the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States. In addition, as a Captain in the United States Army Nurse Corps Reserves from 1988-1993, she developed the weekend critical care program for the Corps.

As a recognized expert in organizational leadership and critical care nursing, she has published in numerous nursing and health care journals and textbooks, presented more than 250 national and international conferences, and provided more than 50 national international consultations. Ms. Krumberger has held leadership positions in numerous professional organizations of which she maintained membership.

Ms. Krumberger received both Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees with distinction from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and served as Affiliate Faculty at Marquette's School of Nursing from 1991-2005. She is a graduate of Leadership VA (2002) and the VHA Executive Career Field Program (2005). She is board certified in Health Care Management by the American College of Health Care Executives where she has held Fellow status since 2007.

## **Gloria Martinez, RN, MS** **Nurse Executive,**

Gloria N. Martinez, RN., MS received her appointment as the VA Palo Alto Health Care System Nurse Executive in January 2009. Ms. Martinez is responsible for ensuring competencies, the recruitment, retention, evidence-based practice, professional integrity and supportive infrastructure of all nursing staff both within and outside of nursing service; approximately 1300 staff.

Ms. Martinez worked her way through nursing school as a nursing assistant, monitor technician and lastly as a ward clerk, receiving her ASN from Grossmont College in El Cajon, CA in 1981. She completed her BS/MS degree from the University of California, San Francisco in 1986 and began her VA Career in 1987 as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Neurosurgery.

In 1990, Ms. Martinez began her management career as the ACNS/Education, then Assistant Chief Nurse at Livermore VA. From there she served as ACNS for Nursing at Syracuse VA, (1995-1998) where she then became co-leader of the GEC Care Line when Care Lines were first introduced. In 1999, she became the ACOS/In Patient Care at the Carl T. Hayden VA, Phoenix Arizona. In 1999-2005, she served as the AMCD/Ambulatory Services and Deputy Nurse Executive at the Greater Los Angeles VA Healthcare System. Just prior to joining Palo Alto, she served as AMCD/Patient Care Services/Nursing.

Ms. Martinez has been a member of Sigma Theta Tau, American Organization of Nurse Executive, Californian Organization of Nurse Executives and the Bay Area Association of Nurse Executives. She held a clinical faculty position at UCSF, 1990-1995. She has successfully passed the ANCC certification exams for both, Clinical Nurse Specialist: Medicine/Surgery, and Nursing Administration Advanced. Within the VA, she is a member of the 2001 fall class of Healthcare Leadership Institute. Ms. Martinez was one of 10 VHA leaders selected to represent the VA in the Interagency Institute program, fall 2005. Currently Ms. Martinez is a member of the National Nurse Executive Council and chairs the Workforce Management workgroup, responsible for the Travel Nurse Corp, Staffing Methodology and RN Residency program.

During her 21 years of service, Ms. Martinez received recognition with both the Hands and Heart Award, 1989 and the Secretaries Excellence Award in Nursing in 1988.



# The Magnet Journey Begins

VAPAHCS was awarded a \$40,000 grant to pursue the designation of Magnet Recognition by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation in August 2008. The monies will be used to provide an on-site visit of two nursing consultants from the American Nursing Credentialing Center (ANCC) in February 11-13, 2009. From this visit, a gap analysis will be prepared by the consultants describing our readiness with suggested areas for improvement while pursuing the Magnet process.

ANCC Magnet designation is recognition for nursing excellence, and identifies healthcare organizations that epitomize outstanding quality and professionalism. The estimated timeframe for VAPAHCS's journey will be three years.

Magnet recognition is a journey about culture and change. The Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) is the transformational leader who develops a strong vision for excellence in patient centered outcomes and nursing professional practice models. Nursing leaders of Magnet organizations implement innovative nursing programs that attract and retain nurses. One key is to identify Magnet champions and get an MD on board early on to educate other MDs. Magnet is an organizational initiative that is built on interdisciplinary teams. Studies have shown better patient outcomes in hospitals meeting the Magnet criteria thus it is imperative that we have the support of the entire hospital staff in order to obtain this nationally recognized prestigious accolade. This journey will involve every service from safety to medical service and hope you join our excitement as we begin our journey with this endeavor.

## Four key elements for organizations prior to submission of the Magnet application

- Innovation-be able to tell your story, what is unique about your organization and nursing
- Excellence-document how your organization demonstrates excellence against national benchmarks.
- Finance-provide budgetary information involving shared governance, research actively recruits and retention, certification, and education conferences.
- Engagement-provide evidence illustration of staff nurse active participation in the Magnet journey. Example includes knowing, articulation and living the 14 forces of Magnetism.

Magnet Recognition means that quality patient care is provided by the highest qualified and motivated nursing staff. We appreciate your support during this process.

*Let the journey begin!*

# All Employees, Especially Veteran Employees:

**Please encourage all patients to sign-up for MyHealthVet. If you are a veteran who receives your health care at VAPAHCS, please enroll in My HealthVet today!**

## **Access these features on-line at My HealthVet:**

- Online prescription refills and personal health logs
- Trusted health information
- VA benefits and services plus VA news and feature stories

## **Future features include:**

- View clinic appointments scheduled for the next 12 months and for the past 2 years
- VA appointment email reminders 14 days prior & 3 days before an upcoming appointment
- Secure messaging with health care providers
- View lab results
- View co-pay balances

## **Register Today!**

1. Go to the web address: [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)
2. Click on the Register Today button:
3. Complete the registration form. Complete all fields noted with a red asterisk. ***If you are a VA Patient, please make sure the VA Patient box is checked***
4. Scroll down to the bottom of the registration page. Review and accept the Terms & Conditions and the Privacy Policy.
5. Press Save in the bottom right-hand corner.
6. Verify your personal identity. Click on the following tab:
7. Then click on the My Account box.
8. Finally, click on:

## **In-Person Authentication (IPA)**

- View the short orientation video
- Go to the VA - Bring one government photo ID such as driver's license, military ID, passport or VA Identification Card (VIC) with you.
- Sign a copy of the My HealthVet Participation Form at Release of Information in Building 100, room F1-115 at Palo Alto; 650-493-5000 x 66406

## **In-Person Authentication (IPA) is also available at:**

Livermore Trailer 34 room 104; 925-373-4700 x35217

The Business Office at Monterey (831) 883-3800

San Jose Clinic, room A304; 408-363-3000 x73554

Menlo Park, Bldg 334, room B203; 650-493-5000 x22899



Or ask a clinic staff member to assist you!

**If you have any questions regarding this program, please contact:**

Jean J. Gurga, MA, OTR/L  
Management & Program Analyst  
Ambulatory Care Service (11C)  
VA Palo Alto Health Care System  
(650) 493-5000, ext. 62124

# VAPAHCS Fitness Classifieds

## What Women Need to Know about Heart Disease and Heart Attacks

### Are women at risk?

Yes. Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women over 65. Heart disease kills 1 in every 4 women, while 1 in 30 dies of breast cancer.

### What do women need to know about heart disease and heart attacks?

Women are less likely to survive heart attacks than men. Warning signs of a heart attack include:

- Chest discomfort
  - Discomfort in one or both arms, neck, jaw, back, or stomach
  - Shortness of breath
  - Nausea, lightheadedness, breaking out in a cold sweat
- Women may also have more vague signs than men such as:
- Unusual tiredness
  - Indigestion (upset stomach)
  - Problems breathing
  - Trouble sleeping
  - Anxiety (feeling uneasy or worried)

### What can women do to protect themselves?

Risk factors are conditions that make a person more likely to develop a disease. You can't change some risk factors, such as family history (heredity) and age. You can change other important risk factors for heart disease:

- |                              |                                 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Lifestyle changes:           | Control these if you have them: |
| • Stop smoking               | • High blood cholesterol        |
| • Increase physical activity | • High blood pressure           |
| • Lose weight if overweight  | • Diabetes                      |

### Should post-menopausal women use hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to reduce heart disease risk?

No. HRT can be used for short periods of time to minimize the symptoms of menopause (such as hot flashes) but should not be used long-term for prevention. Talk with your health care provider about your specific questions and concerns.

**If you think you or someone else is having a heart attack, get help immediately! Call 911!**

## VAPAHCS Employee “Fitness Focus”

### Cardio Kick Boxing (beginning Monday, 2/2):

Beginning to Intermediate Level – 20 minutes cardio, 10 minutes Pilates Mat/Stretch

**When:** Every Monday from 12 – 12:30pm

**Where:** PAD, Building 23 – Gym

**What to bring:** VA ID, water, towel, exercise mat

Please wear appropriate work out attire and tennis shoes.

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For more information, please contact **Bria Heymach**  
at 650-493-5000 ext. 69957

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### Water Fitness Class (Thursdays):

**When:** Every Thursday from 4:45 – 5:30pm

**Where:** PAD, Building 23 - Pool

**What to bring:** VA ID, water, bathing suite, towel, and sandals

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For more information, please contact **Bria Heymach**  
at 650-493-5000 ext. 69957

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No need to sign up in advance, come when you are able.

At the beginning of every class, check in with the lifeguard to show your VA ID badge

*Bria Heymach, a VA employee will be teaching this class, which is why it is FREE!*

## **Fitness Focus Tip**

Water in our bodies is like oil in a car, we need it to run!

Drink a tall glass of water before each meal and you will most likely eat less!

Makes goals to drink x amount of water by lunch, during lunch and before you leave for the day (Just look at the extra bathroom breaks as more exercise!)

Did you know? If you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated!

If water seems to “dull,” try adding a lemon, or make water potpourri: strawberries, oranges, lemons (it looks colorful and it tastes good!)

# *Santa Clara County Honors Vietnam Navy Veteran as 2008 “Friend of the Veteran”*

Walter Dillard is a familiar face to veterans around Santa Clara County, volunteering and supporting patients at the VA Palo Alto Hospital, participating in parades and ceremonies as a member of the honor guard, and leading Bingo nights for veterans. The County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors honored Dillard as the 2008 “Friend of the Veteran.”

“Walter richly deserves this honor for his exceptional commitment to helping his fellow veterans,” said Supervisor Pete McHugh, Chairperson of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors.

A Navy veteran, Dillard served from Feb 1, 1967 to Oct 17, 1970, including duty in Vietnam from 1967-1968 aboard the aircraft carrier USS TICONDEROGA. He was a plane captain on the flight deck, performing pre-and post- flight checks to ensure the aircraft had fuel and ammunition, and securing the pilot in his seat. During the rest of his time in the military, he served aboard the *USS Franklin D. Roosevelt*.

As a VAPAHCS volunteer for more than 5 years, Dillard dedicates himself to helping sight impaired, wheel chair, and spinal cord injured (SCI) veterans. He often assists with sight-impaired veterans serving as their guide. At SCI, his bingo night every Thursday has become a tradition that no patient wants to miss. He prepares refreshments, sets up bingo games and wheels in patients every Thursday night for a lively night of bingo.

When the games are over, he works with the clean up crew. During his first three years at the hospital, Dillard attended veterans for about 30 hours per week. In 2007, he received a special pin honoring him for 2,500 hours of volunteer service.

“Volunteering has made me a better, more thoughtful person,” Dillard said.

Dillard remembers the time when he did not have a car and had to ride his bicycle to the VA Hospital to volunteer. “At first I complained because I got caught in the rain,” continued Dillard. “However after thinking about the situation, I was ashamed because I was going to a place where men and women would love to be able to ride a bike.”

Dillard also serves as Chaplain for the Vietnam Veterans of America, VFW and the United Veterans Council. He is a member of the council representing American Legion Post 881.

“Walter Dillard is a true friend of veterans,” said Ken Kershaw, Director of the Santa Clara County Office of Veterans’ Services. “We are proud to present him with the 2008 Friend of the Veteran Award.”

The Office of Veterans’ Services established the “Friend of the Veteran Award” in 1991 to recognize community members for their outstanding support and dedication to veterans in Santa Clara County. The office assists military retirees and their families in obtaining benefits and services accrued through military service.

# *VAPA Arts' Celebrates the Second Annual Awards Night*

The second annual VAPA Arts Awards Night on February 6, 2009 turned out to be another huge success. VAPA Arts performs throughout the year for events such as the Farmers Market, Recreation Therapy Arts and Craft Festival, Veterans Serving Veterans Celebration, Women's Program, and various special emphasis program events.

The VAPA Arts goal is to form a pool of VAPAHCS employees with artistic talent and showcase them to our staff and Veteran community. The performances highlight musical talent and other performance skills such as poetry, song writing, graphic art, dancing, comedy, acting and other performance art. Participation in this endeavor is voluntary and is without compensation.

Reporting on the Awards Night event Jeff Perez (Human Resource Management) says, "As usual, I have much to say coming off of a successful event such as the Awards Night. The problem is where I should start- there was so much going on Friday. There was a Grammy like buzz in the air! Mr. Jeff "JD" Dempsey took the day off and started at 8:00 AM armed with his tape measure, saw and drill, and he and I finished the stage backdrop. The result was a spectacular cityscape, complete with lighting of stars for the stars. The stage was in place and ready thanks to Bill Ulibarri and Tommie Lampley' Move Team. Early on, the auditorium looked like colony of ants working together with precision. With little rest, JD moved on the audio and band set up with aid from Mr. Fran Foley and Mr. Bob Keller. Meanwhile, Mr. Phoenix Arivett and Ms. Joy Sakamoto feverishly got the rest of the room set up to a standard deserving of the event. Ms. Dee Dee Kramer, the Food Team Leader, took charge of her task and crew and orchestrated them in a professional and presentable manner. Our radiant hostess, Miss Laura Hutchenson was keeping to the standard set by the first Awards Night adorned with a beautiful dress her auntie Evelyn Gaynor helped pick out. The patented "Red Carpet Ritual" by Joy Sakamoto became more refined as did the red carpet itself. Her interviews were both intriguing and entertaining. Our emcees, Ms. Yurika Vu and Mr. Milton Johnson had the most important part of the show and did a spectacular job! The performer's meticulous rehearsals paid off judging by the audience's reaction."

The VAPA Arts is a wonderful program that provides a great service to our Veteran Community. The musicians are talented and performances are very professional and well planned. Check out the VAPA Arts webpage under Employee Services on the VAPAwab Intranet to see upcoming events, view the gallery of photos and to fill out performance request forms.

Congratulations to this year's winners:

- Best Support Artist: Phillip Arivett
- Best New Artist: Lilian Wong
- Artist of the Year: Fran Foley
- Song/Performance of the Year: "We Are Here" by Jeff Perez and the All Veteran Band: Milton Johnson, Henry Boulton, Fran Foley, Jesse Ortega, Reginald Jones and Gary Kirven
- Best Male Vocalist: Jeffrey "JD" Dempsey
- Best Female Vocalist: Beth Longwell
- Best in Art: Three way tie: Joanne Joki (Visual Art E3), Mercy Martin (Hula Ohana O'Leilani), Joy Sakamoto (Poetry in Motion)
- Performer of the Year: Yurika Vu

**We Are VAPA Arts and  
We Are Going STRONG In 2009!**

# You Make a Difference!

## Submitted by staff, our veterans and their families

I was on vacation in California when I found myself without my prescriptions from my Milwaukee VA. I connected with the **Monterey Clinic Pharmacy** and rather quickly received all my needed prescriptions. We were treated with the utmost in care and courtesy. I've always been given the best in care from the VA, but you guys take the cake. Wow!

– A Veteran

I would like to comment on the great service VA Palo Alto provided to my husband for his recent Robotic Prostatectomy, and the hospitality extended to us by the Fisher House. The quality of care from **Dr. Joseph Liao, Marie Macy, RN, Dr. David Duong, the housekeeping staff**, and the **Fisher House** was superb. Please extend my thanks to all of them.

– A Veteran's Wife

This letter is to compliment an outstanding member of your staff, **Nurse Demetris "Dee" Smith**. My 85 year old father, who is a WW II veteran and Battle of the Bulge POW survivor arrived at your Palo Alto ER with a kidney stone. After a painful day and surgery, my father and I feel very fortunate that Dee was his nurse on that day. She helped make this unfortunate situation much easier through her calm competence, genuine caring, great sense of humor, and by keeping me informed by telephone of updates for his release. Dee genuinely cares about her patients and it shines through brightly in the healthcare she provides to them and her interactions with their family.

– A Veterans' Daughter

I would like to express my thanks to **Dr. Timothy Pierhopies** and **Dr. John Leppert** who preformed surgery on my husband to remove a cancerous prostate. We consider ourselves extremely lucky to have had these two doctors provide my husband's medical treatment. Both doctors had great bedside manners and were available at a moments notice to speak with us regarding the surgery and to answer any questions. Complete follow-up and care was demonstrated clearly, especially with my high concern for my husband's post care.

– A Veterans' Wife

Today is the one-month anniversary of the passing of my father. Much of my sense of relief and comfort comes from thinking about his last two weeks of life spent in your **hospice unit** and the grace and kindness of your care. I cannot express the deep gratitude for all the unconditional support everyone offered during the stress we were experiencing. Knowing that he was physically cared for, cleaned, shaved, turned, propped up, and administered pain medications so very timely ... this let us diminish worries about his physical comfort so we could attend to our father with our true feelings. The hospice unit provides excellent clinical care but moreover you provide genuine caring for patients and families. It is the staff, which created this loving energy.

– A Veterans' Daughter

Just a short note to put in a good word for **Quoc Tong** at the **VA Livermore Pharmacy** – he's always most helpful, respectful, polite, and follows through properly and quickly. He does not rush you. He is knowledgeable and he gets things done. I look forward to seeing him because I know I will not have any problems.

– A Veteran

## The Epicenter

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We welcome any comments, photos, suggestions or story ideas you may have; however, due to space limitations, it is not possible to publish all submissions. Please contact Patricia Teran-Matthews (00P) at 650-849-1222 or via email at [patricia.matthews1@va.gov](mailto:patricia.matthews1@va.gov).

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